


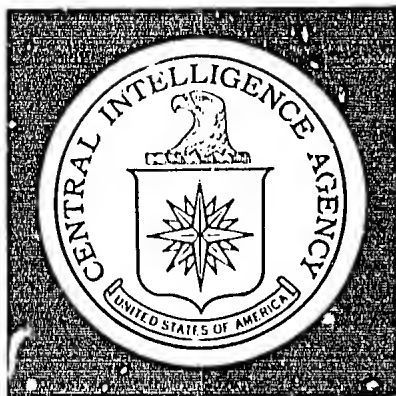
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Bhutan Enters the World Arena

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Nº 667

**8 October 1971
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Bhutan Enters the World Arena

On 21 September 1971, the Year of the Iron Hog in Bhutan, the country was elected to membership in the UN. This secluded Himalayan kingdom, one of the world's smallest independent states, enters the international arena backed by a population of one million who live in a feudal manner not much different than was the case in the 17th century when Bhutan first became a distinct political entity. Since the mid-1960s, a small group of Bhutanese elite has aspired to UN membership in order to ensure international recognition of Bhutan's sovereignty and to hasten development of its backward economy.

The country, almost totally dependent on India for economic and military assistance, is required by treaty to be "guided" by Indian advice in foreign affairs. New Delhi's interest in Bhutan rests heavily on the fact that Bhutan borders on the strategically sensitive Indian corridor that leads to isolated northeast India. New Delhi energetically endorsed the Bhutanese bid for a UN seat, and Bhutan is expected to vote with India on most issues. Peking appears content to see Bhutan develop further as a viable buffer state and has not pressed earlier territorial claims.

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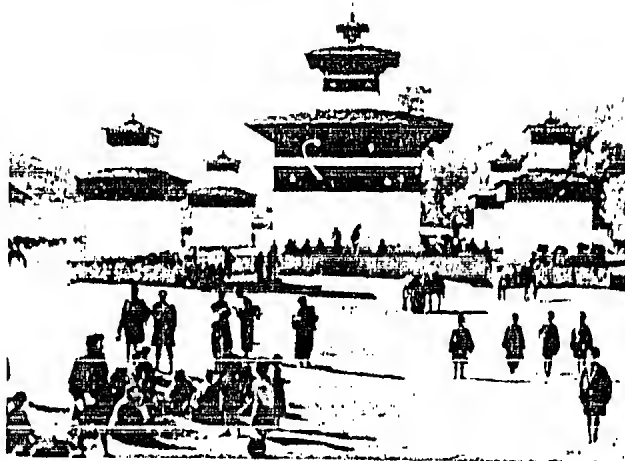
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A Self-sufficient Kingdom

The landlocked Himalayan kingdom, about 19,000 square miles, is nearly the size of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. The majority of its population are Bhotias—Buddhists of Tibetan extraction. This group, which shares the basic features of Tibetan culture, dominates the government and the clergy. People of Nepalese origin and a number of small tribal groups are distinct minorities on the fringe of Bhutanese society. Much of the population lives in almost inaccessible valleys largely untouched by the laws and activities of the government.



Life is primitive, but, compared to much of the rest of Asia, living standards are relatively good. The Bhutanese are self-sufficient, meeting their basic needs by farming, livestock raising, cottage industries, and trade. The country has a good economic potential, but its vast forests have scarcely even been explored, and its mineral resources have not been tapped. Less than five percent of the population is literate, and basic elementary education is just beginning in a limited number of government schools. Some 500 Bhutanese attend secondary schools in India, but probably no more than a few hundred Bhutanese have ever traveled beyond India's borders. The kingdom's international affiliations, prior to admission to the UN, were confined to membership in the Colombo Plan and the International Postal Union.

Constitutional Monarchy in the Making

The ruler of Bhutan is 43-year-old Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. The King (whose official title is Druk Gyalpo or Dragon King) succeeded to the throne in 1952, about 35 years after his grandfather centralized power in the Wangchuk family and became the first monarch of all Bhutan. The family is still in full control. There is no evidence of a serious challenge to the King's pre-eminence in both secular and religious affairs, but Bhutanese history is checkered with power struggles between prominent families. The anticipated



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increase in developmental efforts could upset long-standing balances, and there has already been some evidence of dissension between traditionalists, particularly within the monasteries, and more progressive elements favoring modernization. The King and Queen have lived apart since the mid-1960s when members of her influential family, the Dorjis, were involved in an unsuccessful conspiracy for enhanced power at the King's expense. The King's half-brother has since become his chief adviser, a post previously held by a Dorji.

At present, political power is centralized in the monarchy and a small circle of court officials drawn from the monasteries and landed elite. The few reports emerging from Bhutan indicate that a rudimentary system of representative government is developing at a slow pace. In recent years, the King has taken steps to make the government more democratic, and his proclaimed goal is the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. A 150-member legislature (the Tshogdu or National Assembly), consisting of elected village headmen and Buddhist lamas as well as royal appointees, has functioned since the mid-1950s. In 1968 the King set up a cabinet that now numbers five. The ministers belong to a larger Royal Advisory Council that makes recommendations to the King on economic and administrative matters. The King has introduced a number of reforms, including Bhutan's first law code. More recently, he set up a high court with the authority to hear appeals against judgments of district courts and administrators. A potentially far-reaching innovation was added in 1969 when the King decided that his continuation should depend on his getting a two-thirds majority in a vote to be taken every three years in the National Assembly. Such a vote of confidence was taken last May, and the King won 133 of the 137 votes cast. There are no political parties, but the King has not foreclosed the possibility of their eventual creation.

The King has not recently been incapacitated due to serious illness, as he was several times in the last decade, but his health is not considered



King Wangchuk

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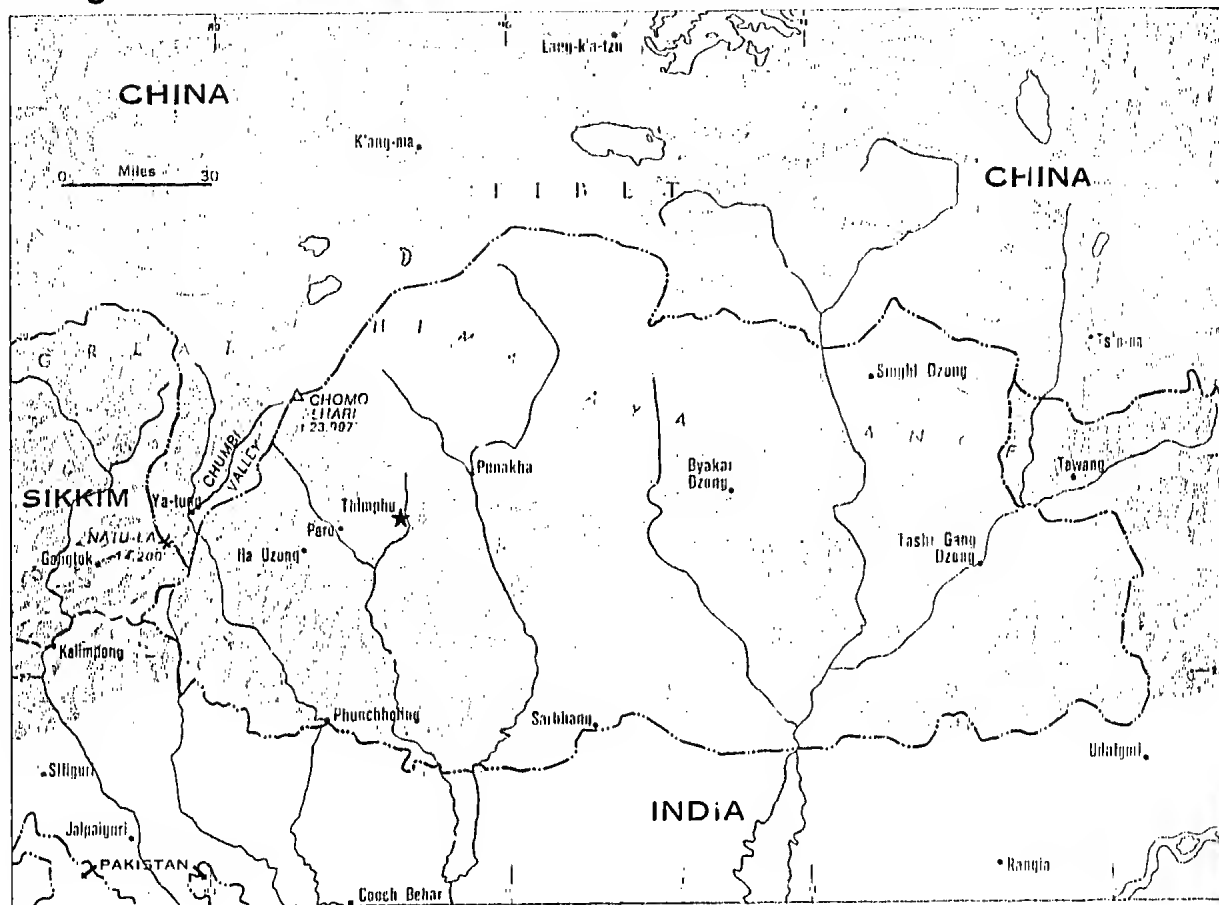
Top: Monks blowing ceremonial trumpets
Center: Market place in Chortens
Bottom: Women pounding grain

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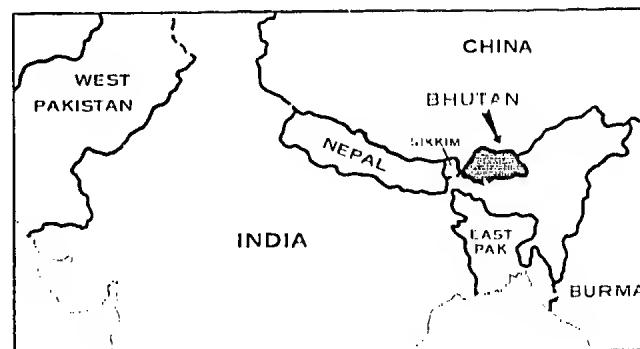
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Kingdom of BHUTAN



AREA: 19,000 sq. miles
POPULATION: approx. 1,000,000



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robust. On his death, or in the highly unlikely event he were to be voted out of office, the throne would pass to the crown prince, who will be 16 in November. A four-man regency council will actually rule until the heir reaches his 21st birthday. The crown prince, who received his secondary education in England and is now being tutored in Bhutan, already has had a far more extensive exposure to the outside world than has his father.

The Crucial Indo-Bhutanese Relationship

India is the most important factor in Bhutan's development. New Delhi inherited Britain's relationship with the kingdom after Indian independence in 1947, and in 1949 a treaty of friendship marked India's formal succession to the role played by Britain. The treaty recognizes Bhutan's sovereignty but requires that the country "be guided by the advice" of India in its external relations. The two countries apparently have reached an accord on the imprecise stipulation regarding foreign affairs, and neither claims a desire for treaty revision. Domestic matters remain in Bhutan's own hands.

In the late 1960s, the Indian Government committed itself to sponsor Bhutan for membership in the UN at some unspecified date. Although progress toward this end probably proceeded faster than New Delhi anticipated, the Indians responded to Bhutanese pressure with enthusiasm and good faith. The Indian UN delegation assisted Bhutanese officials who attended recent UN General Assembly sessions as unofficial observers, provided them with training in diplomacy, and undertook a successful lobbying effort last winter to win Security Council approval for the Bhutanese bid.

The Indians will underwrite most of the cost of maintaining a three-man Bhutanese delegation in New York and will, in effect, groom the delegates for their new role. In return, Bhutan can be expected to vote with India and the Afro-Asian group on most issues. Both are also very much

interested in the international recognition accorded Bhutan, establishing its separate identity. This is significant because the Bhutanese-Tibetan border is undemarcated; indeed, there is no evidence of any treaty that comprehensively defines the more than 200-mile border. Moreover, Bhutan borders on the strategically sensitive Indian corridor that leads to the isolated northeast region.

Indo-Bhutanese relations have become more extensive in concert with Bhutan's growing ability to absorb additional help, particularly in terms of economic aid and training. The kingdom is almost totally dependent on India for financing developmental programs. Bhutan's annual revenue, derived largely from taxes on land and its produce, amounts to only slightly over \$1 million. Its foreign exchange earnings total less than \$100,000, mostly from the sale of postage stamps to collectors. New Delhi plans to contribute about \$47 million to Bhutan's third Five-Year Plan (1971-76), a substantial increase over previous help. In addition, India is making sizable contributions for road construction and is responsible for building the first roads usable by four-wheel-drive vehicles. These join major settlements and connect the capital, Thimphu, with the Indian border.

Hundreds of Indian technicians and advisers are assigned to Bhutan to work on numerous development projects. They are gradually being replaced as more Bhutanese acquire the necessary skills. The pervasive Indian presence arouses resentment among some Bhutanese officials, but the small number of trained Bhutanese makes the situation unavoidable.

The Indo-Bhutanese Defense Arrangement

Indian involvement in Bhutan's defense organization is even more pronounced. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Peking published maps claiming more than 300 square miles of northeastern Bhutan and spoke of "liberating" Bhutan and other Himalayan frontier states "wrongfully held by imperialist India," New

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Delhi began strengthening Bhutan's defenses. Several months before the outbreak of Sino-Indian hostilities in October 1962, New Delhi established a military mission in Bhutan to train and reorganize Bhutan's defense forces. Now, officers in the 6,000-man army receive basic training under Indian direction at the military academy at Ha Dzong in western Bhutan, and some officers are sent for additional training to military institutions in India. In addition to their training function, Indian officers serve with Bhutanese field units, and India regularly rotates Indian Army units through Bhutan, sometimes conducting joint exercises with the Bhutanese.

Indian troops are believed still to man watch posts on the Tibetan-Bhutanese border, with special interest focused on the five strategic passes serving as potential invasion crossing points for an army moving from Tibet into India.

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Both the Bhutanese and Indians recognize that Bhutan could not by itself withstand Chinese incursions. Both seem to believe a close defense relationship enhances Bhutan's security.

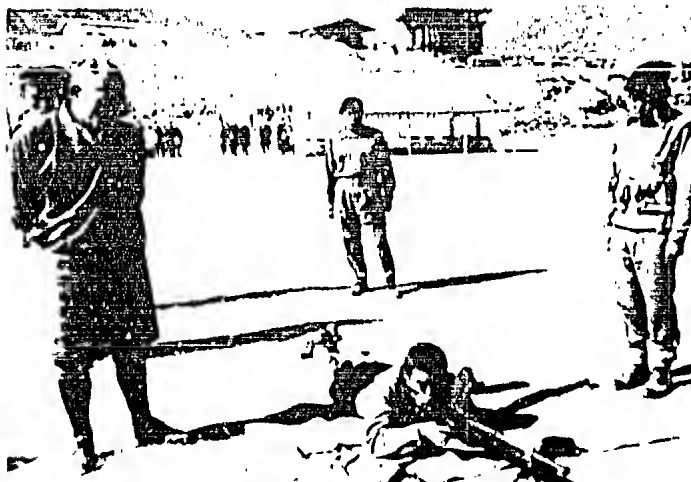
there has been no recent indication of Chinese pressures on Bhutan's borders. It is likely that Chinese troops and Tibetan graziers occasionally wander across the open border by mistake.

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There has been, as far as is known, no recent official contact between Bhutan and Communist China. Sino-Bhutanese relations deteriorated following the Tibetan uprising in 1959 and the withdrawal of the Bhutanese representative in Lhasa. There are no formal ties between the two nor any indication that the Bhutanese are planning to seek resumption of special political or trade relations with Tibet. Chinese troops continue to patrol the border region, but Peking has not pressed its former boundary claims. A Bhutanese official recently declared that in 1970 the Chinese published maps of the border that seemed to indicate

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Peking's acceptance of 'Bhutan's version of the border.

Bhutan Sends Out First Diplomats

In preparation for its debut at the UN, Bhutan established its first permanent mission in India last May. The 48-year-old Pema Wangchuk, who had served as an assistant to the King and more recently as a liaison officer in the Indian road-building effort, was named Bhutan's "special representative" in India. In reciprocation, the ranking Indian official in Bhutan, B. D. Das, was accorded a similar title.

For the near future, Bhutan does not plan to establish any missions in addition to its posts in New Delhi and New York. Designated as its UN permanent representative is 43-year-old Sangey Penjore, minister of communications and a distant relative of the King. He has been in government administration since 1945 and was intricately involved in the steps leading to UN membership. In his brief contacts with US officials, Penjore has appeared friendly and intelligent. He is assisted by an Indian official, A. M. Ram, who is on loan from the Indian Foreign Ministry and had spent the previous three years as an adviser in Bhutan. The second secretary and head of chancery is Kingley Wangdi. Wangdi has dealt with foreign affairs in the National Assembly and served as observer at UN General Assembly sessions during the last three years.

The US has no plans at present to open a post in Thimphu and will conduct its relations through the Bhutanese missions in New York and New Delhi. The US had already recognized Bhutan as a sovereign independent state.

The top echelon of Bhutanese officialdom is relatively realistic about Bhutan's shortcomings in terms of finances and lack of educated manpower. Nevertheless, they decided to push for early full UN membership instead of limiting their participation to the UN's specialized agencies.



King with Indian President Giri and wife

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Top: Indian Army border post
Center: Troops march before King's residence
Bottom: King watches militia training

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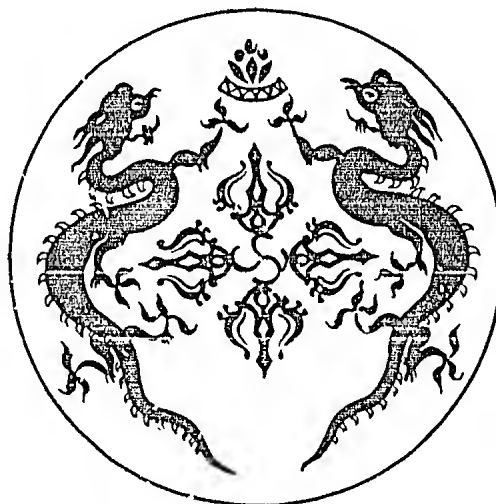
Furthermore, full membership was the only option open as the UN has not yet devised a form of associate membership for "micro-states," such as Bhutan.

today the country is accessible only to invited guests.

There is a realization in Bhutan of the danger of proceeding too fast in opening the country's doors to the world. The King has taken specific measures to preserve Bhutan's heritage; for example, by insisting on the wearing of traditional national dress and by the observance of ancient cultural traditions. Tourism may eventually bring much needed foreign exchange, but

As Bhutan begins to flex its muscles, it probably will seek to assume added responsibilities in the field of foreign affairs. For the near future, however, the Indians and the Bhutanese will continue their cordial political, economic, and military relationship, especially their mutual obligations in the realms of defense and foreign affairs.

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Thunderbolt and Dragon

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